

of the shared benefit of the commons but also from the stewardship and care of the commons.

Interestingly it turns out that restoring a commons to health is deeply linked to restoring the rightful role and responsibility of a community with regard to the resources it considers important. Elinor Ostrom's research on the commons reveals that where communities have a role in taking care of a commons, protecting it, monitoring it for misuse and so on, the commons is healthier.

***Governance — Collaborative, power sharing and participatory***

Whose commons is it? One way to tell is to ask who is shaping how it is taken care of and managed. Through a commons lens, people are viewed as important caretakers of shared resources and as participants in the systems that manage them. At a deep level, a commons approach is rooted in the belief that certain forms of social wealth belong to a given community—belong not just in some vague sense of public-ness, but *belong* in a very real way—and that any governance of those resources derives its legitimacy from honoring that sense of belonging and responsibility.

Establishing structures of governance that foster deep participation and “ownership” by members of a community is challenging and requires us to rethink what works and who has something important to offer. It will vary depending on whether we are talking about managing a local community garden, or something as multi-tiered and complex as a large body of water, or a form of traditional knowledge.

To achieve this new paradigm of power, we need to open up our systems of governance, which are often highly bureaucratic and professionalized, and create new avenues for people to shape, co-create and play decision-making roles at appropriate levels. Equity at this level exists in relationship to a more authentic democracy than we typically experience, one in which our role as citizens is consequential, valued and essential.

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benefit. These are critical steps in building the trust and the capacity for collective stewardship and decision-making.

It is also about truly valuing our natural world, not as a commodity but as a living system on which our lives depend and from which many of our commons derive.

### ***Belonging*** — *New understanding of “ownership”*

In a commons-based society, “ownership” takes on a new meaning beyond “private,” “exclusive,” and “individual”—or even “state owned,” which can be overly bureaucratic. We have to ask: What is ours? And how can we act on that? In a commons, certain forms of social wealth are recognized as belonging to the community and requiring their active stewardship. Naming and activating this kind of “ownership” imbues a sense of responsibility for what is both physically and non-physically shared, as well as a responsibility for future generations and other living beings.

The commons offers a claim of belonging that comes from a historic and/or practiced set of relationships. A commons is ours because we have taken care of it, created it, lived with it, shared it, come to know it. Our work needs to cultivate the kind of belonging that recognizes that some things cannot and should not be owned by any one person, but must be valued and shared differently. It is a kind of belonging that tends toward broader benefit rather than scarcity and inequity.

### ***Sustainability*** — *Sufficiency, resilience, and stewardship for future generations*

Commons-based solutions should explicitly value a balance of ecological well-being and human well-being, of the preservation of a commons resource and the life and livelihoods that depend on it. They need to recognize that our survival depends on the health of the earth and the strength of our relationships to one another.

The idea of sufficiency—to have enough, but not to have excess—is an important aspect of sustainability and has significance for equity. We have to ask who else depends on this resource? How does my use reflect an understanding of our shared reliance? Is the resource allocation one that sustains life into the future for all, or does it repeat patterns of resource dominance and exclusivity? To respect sufficiency, we must calibrate our use of any given resource to what is possible given both its limits and the needs of other living beings. This requires a commitment to the whole community’s well-being, and a sustained responsibility to others, including those whom we will never know.

### ***Responsibility*** — *Preventing harm, repairing inequity and damage*

Commons-based solutions can advance equity, but doing so will not be easy given the historic exclusion of certain communities and the appropriation of resources. It should go without saying that we need to prevent future enclosure, appropriation, depletion, and privatization of the commons. But as we think forward to establishing more equitable sharing of resources, it is important to notice that communities have not just been cut out

## Equity and the Commons

*Under what conditions will commons solutions advance racial, social, and economic equity?*

The revival of the commons as a way to fairly use and preserve the resources we need to share is a critical antidote for the times in which we find ourselves—times of growing inequity, unchecked consumption, ecological crises, and privatized resource control.

Central to the history and practice of the commons is the idea of equitable sharing. That equitable sharing takes three distinct forms: shared use/benefit, shared stewardship, and shared responsibility or decision-making.

In a commons, resources are managed to benefit everyone and to preserve those resources for the future. So it follows that equity lies at the very heart of the commons.

But given the extreme racial, economic, gender-related, and countless other forms of inequity we live with, and the history that has produced those inequities, extra work will need to be undertaken to acknowledge and repair that legacy and its damage; otherwise, we will build an exclusionary commons that recreates unjust relationships. We will perpetuate the reality marginalized communities have disproportionately lost access, benefit, and control of their commons.

To achieve the goal of achieving greater equity through commons-based solutions, we are exploring the following question: Under what conditions will commons solutions advance racial, social, and economic equity?

Here is our initial answer, as it relates to each of five commons principles:

***Relationship*** — *Deepened sense of interdependence with the "others" with whom we share our commons and with our living planet*

A living commons is basically a set of relationships among a group of people and the resources they value. If we want to increase equity through commons-based solutions, we must always ask who is the "we"? What community has a logical relationship to the commons, given its scale and use? Are there groups that have been denied equitable access to the commons in the past or present? What can be done to restore those commoners' rightful relationship and role in the commons?

Restoring relationship is about beginning to understand and value each other as beings with shared needs, responsibilities, and ultimately destinies. It is about cultivating authentic community, something greatly impoverished by our individualistic, industrialized society and essential for cultivating high levels of reciprocity and shared